

Helps in Bible Study

Among the privileges of the believer is the ability to study the Written Word of God. When the believer is spiritual, the Holy Spirit can illumine that one to the truth of God's Word. But of course, there is some human involvement in the process. We must study God's Word before the Holy Spirit will illumine us. Having said that, the logical question is, "How do I study the Scriptures?" While there are books written on how to study the Bible, most believers have not seen nor read them.

It is not our intent this morning to write a book nor to give a magic formula on how to study God's Word. Instead, we want to look at a few simple words in the English text of the Bible which can greatly help in the study of the Epistles to the Church. There are three words in the KJV to which most give little thought. In everyday speaking, these are words which seem to be of little importance.

However, in the English text of the New Testament, these little words are often very important. What are these 3 "little words"? The largest of the three is "*therefore*"¹ and the other 2 are "*for*" and "*and*."

It is our theme this morning that "*therefore, and, and for*" are often the keys to understanding New Testament Scripture. And so we begin with-

I. Paul's warnings to the Ephesian Elders, Acts 20:17-38

A. Paul intended to pass by the Ephesian Church, **Acts 20:16-17**, "For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost. (17) And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church."

1. Paul was on his way to deliver the offering from Macedonia and Achaia. In his letter to Rome, Paul explained, **Romans 15:25-26**, "But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. (26) For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem."
2. However, something was on Paul's mind that he needed to share with the Church. So instead of visiting the Church, he sent for the elders, Acts 20:17².
3. Acts 20 also contains an important lesson about elders according to Scripture.
 - a. Paul called "the elders" of Ephesus, Acts 20:17. This is **presbuteroj**, presbuteros, from which we get "Presbyterian" or *elder*.
 - b. Paul told "the elders" **Acts 20:28**, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to

¹ Because "therefore" primarily translates 2 small Greek words, *ara* and *dioti*, it qualifies as a "small word."

² In Acts 20:25, Paul believed he would never return to Ephesus because, Acts 21:13, "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for **I am ready** not to be bound only, but also **to die at Jerusalem** for the name of the Lord Jesus." Paul was wrong to go, and was warned by the Holy Spirit, but determined to go anyway. It is this belief, that he would die, that led him to meet with the Ephesian elders and tell them they would never see him again.

feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

- 1) “The elders” have been made “overseers” by the Holy Spirit. “Overseers” is **episkopoj**, episkopos, from which we get “Episcopalian,” and *bishop*.
- 2) The “elder-bishops” were told to “feed the church of God.” “Feed” comes from **poimainw**, poimaino, the verbal form of “shepherd.”
- 3) Thus, an *elder* is a *bishop* is a *pastor*. It is a 3-fold description of what we normally call “a pastor-teacher.”

B. Some little words highlight Paul’s warning to the Ephesian Elders, **Acts 20:25-31**, “**And now, behold**, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. (26) **Wherefore** I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. (27) **For** I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. (28) Take heed **therefore** unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (29) **For** I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. (30) **Also**³ of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. (31) **Therefore** watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”

1. Notice how each verse begins with a “little word.” And yet, each one of them is important; each one is a marker of that sets the framework for what Paul was saying to these elders. *Imagine how the text would sound if we omitted any of the words.*
2. First, in v. 25, 3 “little words” emphasize the seriousness of his words.
 - a. “*And*” indicates that Paul is continuing what he has just said, v. 24, “...that I might finish my course...to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”
 - b. “*Now*” reveals that Paul is looking forward. His mind is made up, and from this time on, Paul believes the Ephesian Elders will never see him again.
 - c. “*Behold*” means “**pay attention to what I am saying and think about it.**”
 - d. When considered together, these words mean that Paul wanted the Ephesian Elders to understand he is now looking forward to the end of his ministry.
 - e. It is only as he is on the way to Jerusalem that Paul reveals what he really had been thinking, **Acts 21:13**, “Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? **for I am ready** not to be bound only, but also **to die at Jerusalem** for the name of the Lord Jesus.” However, we know that Paul was acting against the Holy Spirit’s specific instructions, **Acts 21:10-11**.

³ “Also” is **kai**, which is normally translated “and.” The ASV, NAS, ESV all translate **kai** as “and;” only the NKJV and KJV translate as “also.”

3. In v. 26, “*wherefore*” is literally “*because of that*”⁴ and marks an announcement.
 - a. Because Paul believed he would never come back to Ephesus, he now says, “I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all *men*.”
 - b. “All *men*” must be kept in context. Paul was speaking to the Ephesian elders not *all men* everywhere (and “*men*” is not in the Greek).
 - c. This is what was on Paul’s heart, the very reason he called the elders. By announcing that they would never see him again, Paul emphasized how important his words were. **In Paul’s mind, this the last time he will ever address these elders. For that reason, he holds back nothing. Here we could compare 2 Timothy.**
4. Verse 27 begins with *for*, meaning, “*because*” and explains *why* Paul was innocent of anything that might happen to the Ephesian elders.
 - a. Paul taught these men “all the counsel of God,” **something he never said to any other Church or individual.**
 - b. “All the counsel of God” must be limited to things Paul taught the Ephesians.
 - It refers to all that God has determined for the New Testament believer.
 - This is not “the Decree;” Scripture does not reveal everything that God has planned for Cherubim, Seraphim, angels and man.
 - In light of the Epistle of Ephesians, “all the counsel of God” is what we commonly call “***the Christian life.***” **The Epistle to the Ephesians begins on that very note, Ephesians 1:3,** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”
 - c. **This** is why Paul could say, “I am pure from the blood of all *men*.” He taught the Ephesian elders *everything* they needed to know about the Christian life. **And if they erred, it would not be Paul’s fault.**

This is why we believe that 3 “little words” can be an important key to understanding the New Testament. Because we believe in the Verbal Inspiration of the Scriptures, every word is important- even “the little words.”

In this passage in Acts, the “little words” are the key to understanding what Paul had to say and why it was so important that he stopped at Miletus and sent for the elders. In truth, there are no “little words” in Scripture. They are all important.

⁴ Greek, **διοτι**, dioti a compound form of **δια**, and **οτι**.